

October 2015

Santa Rosa County District 3 Newsletter

A Message From Your Commissioner



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**Santa Rosa County
Commission**

I can't believe 2015 has almost come and gone. The holidays are quickly approaching. This will be my last newsletter as Chairman of the Board. It has been an exciting time as we continue to make Santa Rosa County "a great place to live, work and play". I truly appreciate everyone's commitment and hard work in serving the citizens of our county.

Even though 2015 was a good year, it brought several changes to our staff. First, Avis Whitfield, our Public Works Director, retired with Stephen Furman being chosen as his replacement. Secondly, Hunter Walker announced his retirement in December. Our board continues to work with the Florida Association of Counties screening committee to ensure we get the best person possible as our next County Administrator. Thirdly, DeVann Cook will also be retiring by the end of November. Our Public information officer, Joy Tsubooka, will be leaving at the end of October to take the Community & Media Relations Division Manager position in Escambia County – Wow, many great people's shoes to fill. 2016 will be an exciting and challenging year.

When I first became Chairman in November 2014, I started the new year off with a workshop to help set goals for 2015. One of those goals was to increase transportation funding for our roads and drainage problems. After several meetings, including public input, our board voted to increase our fuel tax six cents, to total 12 cents. This will help ensure we are able to maintain our roads in a safe condition and relieve the pressure off of property tax (see page 2 for more information). Escambia and Okaloosa counties have already increased their local option fuel tax to 11 and 12 cents respectfully. We must have a dedicated source of road funds to ensure we not only are maintaining our roads but are planning for the future as well. Our board is working hard to address current and future needs and I am proud of our progressive decisions.

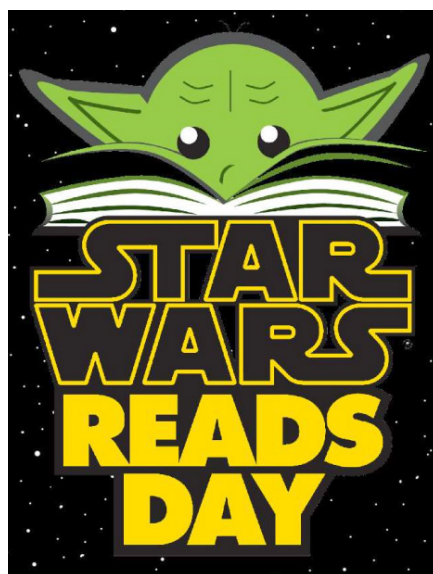
Once again, this will be my last newsletter as your Chairman. I am honored and extremely grateful to have served you during 2015, and look forward to many more successful years as we all work to make our county "a great place to live, work and play".

Sincerely,

Star Wars Reads Day @ Your Library

The force is strong at the Santa Rosa County Libraries! Join us for Star Wars Reads Day in each of your county libraries in October. There will be crafts, activities, costumes, galactic goodies, and contests.

- Gulf Breeze Library, October 10, 10 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
- Jay Library, October 10, 9 a.m. – 1 p.m.
- Navarre Library, October 10, 10 – 11:30 a.m.
- Pace Library, October 10, 9 a.m. – 1 p.m.
- Milton Library, October 17, 10 a.m. - noon



Also enjoy the Star Wars themed displays and check out something that's out of this world! Find additional information at www.santarosa.fl.gov/libraries or call (850) 981-7323 (READ).



Commission Approves 2015/2016 Budget *From Staff Reports*

On Sept. 15, the Santa Rosa County commission passed the 2015/2016 fiscal year budget, which runs Oct. 1 –Sept. 30, 2016. The budgeting process was particularly difficult this year with an increase in expenditures of \$4.8 million and revenues only increasing \$2 million, creating a \$2.8 million shortfall. Many have asked, why not just “trim the fat?” While it is extremely important to continue to look at operations and increase efficiency continually, since 2007 Santa Rosa County has cut the budget to adjust for annual decreases in property tax revenue as high as \$14 million, including eliminating 118 positions. The increase in state mandates which included \$940,000 for Medicaid costs, \$585,000 for juvenile justice and increased retirement charges of \$300,000 were too much for the county budget to absorb or cut. The budget was balanced with no increases in property taxes but by utilizing capital funds, or non-reoccurring monies, increasing the gas tax, adjusting building fees, and by offering no increases to employee salaries or benefits.

In September, the commission also voted to increase the gas tax and adjust fees for building services. Both actions are expected to have minimal impact to county residents. The gas tax will increase to 12 cents on Jan. 1, 2016. This brings the county gas taxes in line with our neighbors, Escambia with 11 cents and Okaloosa with 12 cents. The increase allows the county to better address roadway issues, without increasing property taxes. Another advantage is that gas taxes are paid by everyone, including renters, tourist and those simply passing through our county causing wear and tear to our roads. The market is expected to remain stable (see chart below, yellow indicates lowest price according to GasBuddy.com) with the increase being absorbed at the distribution and store level as our gas prices historically are driven by prices in our neighboring counties. Additionally, building fees, which had not increased since 2006, were adjusted beginning Oct. 1

to better align both our true costs and charges of our neighboring counties.

During the budget process, the commission looked at a variety of ways to balance the budget, with the common theme being diversifying the county's streams of revenue. Santa Rosa County is highly dependent on property tax, which means property owners are bearing the majority of the burden. When compared to the state average, Santa Rosa depends on property taxes for 53 percent of its budget, while other counties average 26 percent. The difference is many counties have other sources of revenue like local option sales tax, higher user fees, and taxes for specific items like public safety, stormwater or park improvement and libraries.

While the 2015/2016 budget is balanced, the next fiscal year will also be a struggle. In 2016, the commission will look at asking residents to pass a local option sales tax to further relieve some of the burden that is on the property owners. A local option sales tax is a state authorized sales tax on retail purchases used by counties to raise money for certain projects. Experts often consider a local option sales tax as the most equitable tax because everyone pitches in. Funds generated by a local sales tax can only be used for capital projects like paving roads, improving drainage systems, public safety services, and building public facilities like a courthouse and parks that have a life of five years or more. Counties are able to levy local option sales taxes on top of the state sales tax amount of six percent, and most do - 56 of the 67 Florida counties had a local sales tax in 2014.

To see the complete 2015/2016 fiscal year budget visit www.santarosa.fl.gov/budget.

Five Year Major Resurfacing Needs

- Hickory Hammock Road
- Market Road
- Country Mill Road
- Munson Highway
- America Avenue
- Segura Street
- Greenwood Road
- Allentown Road
- Coral Street
- Del Monte Street
- Oak Drive
- Soundside Drive
- Morristown Road
- C.R. 182
- Manatee Street
- Kell Road
- West Bayshore
- Whispering Pines Blvd.
- Edgewood Drive
- East Bay Boulevard
- Hickory Shores Boulevard
- Hickory Shores Road
- Woodbine Road
- Tractor Trail
- College Parkway

Potential Third Lane Projects

- Three lane Chumuckla Highway – Norris Road to Five Point
- Three lane Berryhill – West Spencer Field to Ashmore Drive

Date	Milton 32583 6 cents	Navarre 32566 6 cents	Pensacola 32514 11 cents	Pensacola 32507 11 cents	Okaloosa 32548 12 cents	Okaloosa 32578 12 cents
7/8/2015	\$2.57	\$2.59	\$2.56	\$2.56	\$2.63	\$2.62
7/10/2015	\$2.57	\$2.59	\$2.56	\$2.56	\$2.63	\$2.61
7/16/2015	\$2.49	\$2.51	\$2.51	\$2.55	\$2.63	\$2.52
7/21/2015	\$2.49	\$2.56	\$2.51	\$2.49	\$2.61	\$2.50
7/27/2015	\$2.47	\$2.49	\$2.47	\$2.49	\$2.57	\$2.45
8/1/2015	\$2.39	\$2.39	\$2.42	\$2.41	\$2.52	\$2.38
8/10/2015	\$2.35	\$2.42	\$2.37	\$2.38	\$2.46	\$2.31
8/17/2015	\$2.43	\$2.46	\$2.39	\$2.38	\$2.41	\$2.34
8/25/2015	\$2.29	\$2.34	\$2.27	\$2.28	\$2.31	\$2.19
9/4/2015	\$2.21	\$2.21	\$2.18	\$2.14	\$2.23	\$2.12
9/9/2015	\$2.17	\$2.17	\$2.15	\$2.12	\$2.21	\$2.11

Public Works Projects *From Staff Reports*

Santa Rosa County has an ongoing program to pave county maintained dirt roads and resurface county maintained paved roads. New pavement is constructed by a contractor, but county road and bridge employees are involved in the preparation prior to paving and shoulder work after paving in order to reduce the cost of paving projects. Residents with questions are encouraged to call the Santa Rosa County Road and Bridge Department at (850) 626-0191 or public-works@santarosa.fl.gov.

The following roads in District 3 have recently been resurfaced:

- Elliott Lane
- Buck Russell Road
- Shell Road
- Gene Fleming Road
- Wiley Scott Road
- Antique Lane

Park Improvements:

- Fidelis – Constructed an open end covered facility for portable concessions (pictured right)
- Town of Jay - Contribution in the amount of \$25,000 for park maintenance
- Futbol Club of Santa Rosa - Purchase of chest freezer
- Santa Rosa Soccer/Horse Park - Purchase of new ice machine for the horse arena concession stand
- Pace Area Tennis Association - Contribution in the amount of \$15,000 to promote Cardio Tennis and Quick Start Tennis; this expense was split equally between Districts 1 and 3



Local Crop Update *By Mike Donahoe*

It has been quite a summer with lots of heat and spotted rainfall in the farming community. Farms in the Allentown and Chumuckla Communities and south of Highway 182 have received adequate rain most of the season. Whereas, farms farther north and around Jay have suffered drought conditions. Spider mites, which are a dry weather pest, have also caused havoc in many Jay area peanut and cotton fields. In addition, farmers have had to deal with caterpillar pests and plant diseases, such as, white mold in peanuts and target leafspot in cotton.

Because of the drought effects farmers started harvesting peanuts early in the Jay area to salvage what crop they had. Cotton fields have also "cut out" early and harvest has begun in early planted fields. Normally peanut harvest doesn't begin until late September and cotton harvest in October. As a result, it looks like county average yields will be down considerably from the high yields that we have seen the last several years.



49th Annual Santa Rosa County Farm Tour

Join UF/IFAS Extension Santa Rosa County and other organizing agricultural partners for the 49th Annual Santa Rosa County Farm Tour on October 29th. During the day long tour you will learn firsthand about agriculture, specifically cotton production, and its importance to the local economy.

The event starts at 7:30 a.m. with buses returning at 4:30 p.m. The tour is \$20 and includes a continental breakfast and lunch.

Register online at <http://www.eventbrite.com/e/49th-annual-santa-rosa-county-farm-tour-tickets-18576565006>





For more information, visit
thebeachestowoodlandstour.com



Don't You Deserve a Fall Break? — More than 40 events! —

All Month Long

- Sweet Season Farms Corn Maze and Fall Fun Festival
- Holland Farms Pumpkin Patch & Maze
- Adventures Unlimited Fall Foliage Zipline Tours
- Birding, Gulf Breeze Zoo
- Gulf Islands National Seashore, Naval Live Oaks Visitor Center

Sept. 19-Nov. 8

- Sonshine Family Farms Corn Mazes and Pumpkin Patch

Weekends in October

- Haunted Woods: Deadly Games

Sept. 18, 25, Oct. 2, 9, 16, 23, and 30

- Bands on the Blackwater and Riverwalk Market

Oct. 3

- Juana's 3rd Annual Oktoberfest Beer Tasting
- Take a Kid Fishing
- City of Milton Riverwalk Run 5K
- Pink Pirates Run/Walk 5K (Making Breast Cancer Walk the Plank)
- Sand Dollar Saturday & Local Marketplace,

October 3, 10, 17, and 24

- Arcadia Mill "Secrets of Santa Rosa Archeology & History in Your Own Backyard"

Oct. 3, 10, 17, 24, 31

- Holley Hill Pottery and Art Studio Kiln Openings

Oct. 3 & 10

- Bagdad United Methodist Church History Open House

Oct. 3-4

- Navarre Fishing Rodeo
- 26th Annual Jay Peanut Festival

Oct. 8

- Paint it Pink

Oct. 9-11

- 34th Annual St. Rose of Lima International Fall Festival

Oct. 10

- West Florida Railroad Museum Depot Days Celebration.
- Fall Gardening for the South
- Holley-Navarre Fire District 7th Annual Fire Prevention Festival
- 6th Annual Run for the Reef 5K & 10K and Kid's One Mile Fun Run
- Pinktober Fest "Making Breast Cancer Walk the Plank"
- 5th Annual Bagdad Milton Plein Air Paint Out
- 2015 Oct Psychic Fair
- Science Talk, Navarre Beach Marine Science Station

Oct. 10-11

- Blackwater Heritage Festival (Munson)

Oct. 13

- Meet the Artist at a Special Place

Oct. 16-18, 23-25 and 30-31

- Whispering Pines Christmas Tree Farm Haunted Hayrides, Bonfires, Concerts and Farm Farm

Oct. 16-17

- Monarch Madness Butterfly Festival

Oct. 17

- Saturday by the Sea, Navarre Beach Marine Science Station
- Navarre Women's Expo
- Sea Turtle Extravaganza
- 15th Annual Navarre Car, Truck, and Bike Show and
- Craft Fair
- 16th Annual Fenner McConnell/Mark Wantz Blackwater Heritage Century Ride
- Bridge To Bridge 5K

Oct. 17-18 & Oct. 24-25

- Boo at the Zoo – Trick or Treat Trail

Oct. 18

- 22nd Annual Charity Chili Cook-off and Volleyball Tourney

Oct. 18, Oct. 25

- Coldwater Gardens Workshops

Oct. 23-24

- 15th Annual Ghost Walk Downtown Milton

Oct. 24

- Ladies Night at Alyssa's

Oct. 24-Nov. 1

- Panhandle Trace Annual Hikes

Oct. 30-31

- Science Spookatular by the Sea Marine Science Station.

